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COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 238th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 15 May 1998, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. KA (Senegal)

CONTENTS

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN ON THE INTERNATIONAL NGO MEETING ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE AND THE UNITED NATIONS SEMINAR ON ASSISTANCE TO THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE, CAIRO, 25 TO 26 AND 27 TO 28 APRIL 1998, RESPECTIVELY

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN ON HIS ATTENDANCE AT THE BETHLEHEM 2000 PARTICIPANTS' CONFERENCE, BRUSSELS, 11 TO 12 MAY 1998

NORTH AMERICAN NGO SYMPOSIUM ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE, UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, 15 TO 17 JUNE 1998

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS AND THE SITUATION IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY, INCLUDING JERUSALEM

OTHER MATTERS

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The agenda was adopted.

2. The CHAIRMAN welcomed the new representative of Turkey to the Committee. His long diplomatic experience, especially as Turkey's Ambassador in Tehran, Moscow and Bonn, would be very useful to the Committee.

3. Mr. VURAL (Turkey) thanked the Chairman for his kind words. He said that he looked forward to participating in the Committee's work under his enlightened guidance. He offered condolences to the families of the Palestinian victims in the incidents that had taken place in Gaza.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN ON THE INTERNATIONAL NGO MEETING ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE AND THE UNITED NATIONS SEMINAR ON ASSISTANCE TO THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE, CAIRO, 25 TO 26 AND 27 TO 28 APRIL 1998, RESPECTIVELY

4. The CHAIRMAN, reporting on the two meetings, said that the Committee's delegation had been composed of the Chairman, Mr. Farhadi (Pakistan), Vice-Chairman, Mr. Saliba (Malta), Rapporteur, Mr. Andjaba (Namibia) and Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine). By organizing the International NGO Meeting in Cairo, the Committee had satisfied a request by international, Palestinian and Israeli organizations that the event should be held in the Middle East. The central theme of the meeting had been "The question of Palestine: The international responsibility 50 years later". At the opening session, statements had been made by the Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, on behalf of the Secretary-General, he himself as Chairman of the Committee, the Permanent Representative of Palestine to the League of Arab States, and the Chairman of the International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine (ICCP).

5. Two panels had been held. The first, entitled "The international responsibility 50 years later", had brought out the historical consequences of political developments since the adoption of the partition resolution, discussed the recent political developments in the peace process and stressed the need for international protection and support of the Palestinian people. The second panel had focused on the support given by non-governmental organizations to international efforts to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, and in particular on action by non-governmental organizations to ensure the application of international instruments relevant to Palestine, including the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and on campaigns by non-governmental organizations against settlements and for East Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian State.

6. In addition to the panels, two workshops had been held. The first had focused on action by non-governmental organizations in support of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination; and the second on cooperation

with Palestinian and Israeli non-governmental organizations and on coordination of international campaigns. Speakers had underscored the impasse in the peace process and the serious economic situation in the Palestinian territories. A number of speakers had stressed the need for the Palestinian leadership to proceed to declare an independent Palestinian State and for non-governmental organizations to mobilize support for such a move. Many non-governmental organizations had said that there should be better cooperation among non-governmental organizations within the Middle East and that it was important to allow the Israeli peace forces to play a greater role. In that context, the possibility of establishing a centre for non-governmental organizations in Cairo to promote that kind of cooperation had been raised. Participants from the non-governmental organizations had also welcomed the holding of the NGO Symposium in Brussels and stressed the importance of organizing more such meetings there. They had agreed on a final statement reaffirming the NGO Plan of Action adopted at the previous international NGO Meeting in August 1997 in Geneva.

7. The United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, on the theme "Facing the challenges of the Year 2000: Promoting Palestinian development", took place on 27 and 28 April. In addition to representatives of 61 Governments, 3 intergovernmental organizations, 10 United Nations organizations and agencies and 27 non-governmental organizations, several prominent representatives of the Palestinian Authority had attended.

8. The aim of the seminar had been to encourage the international community to assist the Palestinian people to overcome internal as well as external obstacles to the implementation of its economic and social development plan. It had been the sixth in a series of annual seminars on economic and social issues held under the Committee's auspices and had given particular attention to the Palestinian Authority's development plan for 1998-1999 and to the recently concluded population census in Palestine.

9. At the opening session, a statement on behalf of the Government of Egypt had been made by the Egyptian Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs and a message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations had been delivered by the Under-Secretary-General and Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories. He himself had spoken as Chairman of the Committee, and the Palestinian Authority's Minister of Planning and International Cooperation had also made a statement.

10. The Minister of Planning and International Cooperation had focused on the challenges and prospects of planning Palestinian national development. He had drawn attention to the constant efforts in that regard by the Palestinian Authority, the contributions of the United Nations and donor countries, and the need for international assistance and support in overcoming the political obstacles that hindered prospects for economic development.

11. In the first round table, panellists had focused on the goals, strategies and priorities of Palestinian national development and had discussed major economic indicators and social conditions. The role of donor countries and the reliance on external resources in drawing up and implementing the development plan had also been considered.

12. In the second round table entitled "Gathering information for future planning", the panellists had, on the basis of the results of the Palestinian census, discussed the structure, trends and historical perspective of the Palestinian people. They had also dealt with aspects of the Palestinian labour force such as characteristics, skills, trends and potential.

13. The third round table had focused on the obstacles facing the Palestinian economy and development and the role of the international community in overcoming them. The participants had discussed the challenges involved in planning for future development, the efforts made by the Palestinian Authority to overcome the consequences of Israel's closure policies on Palestine's economy and development plans and what Governments and intergovernmental organizations could do to minimize the impact. The activities and efforts of United Nations programmes and agencies and of non-governmental organizations in the region had also been reviewed. The encouragement and wise advice on the Committee's future work that the Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs had given to the members of the Committee were warmly appreciated and the Committee was most grateful to the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt for having graciously hosted the two events.

14. In accordance with established practice, the reports of the two events would be issued as publications of the Division for Palestinian Rights. In addition, the report of the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People would be submitted to the Presidents of the Economic and Social Council and of the General Assembly, with a request that they be circulated under the appropriate agenda items at their next sessions. A summary of the proceedings would be included in the report of the Committee to the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. The text of the final statement of the NGO Meeting would also be posted on the Internet.

15. He took it that the Committee wished to take note of the report by the Chairman.

16. It was so decided.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN ON HIS ATTENDANCE AT THE BETHLEHEM 2000 PARTICIPANTS' CONFERENCE, BRUSSELS, 11 TO 12 MAY 1998

17. The CHAIRMAN, reporting on the Bethlehem 2000 Participants' Conference, said that it had been opened by the President of the European Commission, in the presence of President Yasser Arafat, the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Mayor of Bethlehem, representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank and many religious figures and businessmen interested in the "Bethlehem 2000" project.

18. Launched two years earlier by the Palestinian Authority in cooperation with UNESCO, the Bethlehem 2000 project would commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem 2,000 years earlier. It would also be the occasion for Christians, Muslims and all people to take full measure of the force and indispensable nature of Christ's message of peace, hope and redemption.

19. Several projects planned by the Palestinians and the international organizations involved had been presented, in five main sectors: restoration of the infrastructure ($109 million); improvement of services ($51 million); promotion of tourism ($21 million) in the expectation that in the year 2000 some 2 million tourists would flock to Bethlehem between December 1999 and Easter 2001, requiring an expanded hotel capacity of 1,350 rooms in the city; cultural heritage ($32 million), the plan being to set up a cultural centre known as the "Hope Centre"; and the private sector ($85 million).

20. The total cost of the various projects was estimated at $336 million, $51 million of which would be funded from services performed and $3 million by the Palestinian Authority. Thus, $285 million had to be raised from the international community.

21. At the Brussels Conference, new pledges and the confirmation of earlier pledges had been announced by several countries and organizations (Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Japan, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United States of America, the Order of Malta, the World Bank and UNDP).

22. Several messages of support had been addressed to the Conference, in particular by the French President, Jacques Chirac, and the Secretary-General of the United Nations. President Arafat had thanked the participants and invited them to join the Bethlehem celebrations, which, he hoped, would confirm the reconciliation of all the peoples of the region.

23. Outside regularly scheduled Conference events, the Chairman had met with President Arafat, the Minister of Planning and International Cooperation of the Palestinian Authority, and the General Coordinator of the Bethlehem 2000 project. He had also had meetings with the Mayor of Bethlehem and the Assistant Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories and a number of other representatives of organizations.

24. The hope was that reconciliation would restore calm to the Middle East region, where peace, so close in recent years, again seemed to be growing remote, for its peoples had always carried messages of peace and tolerance to the world.

25. Mr. FARHADI (Afghanistan) said that he welcomed the Chairman's participation in a meeting in Brussels that had been extremely important for the entire world. The Palestinian people obviously had every right to host the commemoration symbolizing the message of peace and tolerance of Jesus Christ, who had been born in that land 2,000 years earlier. The Committee could not fail to be grateful to the Palestinian authorities and the Palestinian people for having understood the importance of such a commemoration. The arrangements that would have to be made to deal with the convergence of prominent persons and pilgrims upon Bethlehem would have financial implications. The scheduled dates of the commemoration, of the utmost importance not only for Christians and Muslims but also for the faithful of other great world religions, would make it possible to observe the different Christian calendars. The decision to ask that the question should be placed on the agenda of the coming session of the General Assembly had been well taken.

26. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Observer for Palestine) welcomed the new member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Ambassador of Turkey, whom he thanked for his message of condolence addressed to the families of the victims of the tragic events which had taken place the day before. He also thanked the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt for serving as host to the International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine and the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian people. He also welcomed the participation of the Chairman in the "Bethlehem 2000" Conference held at Brussels on 11 and 12 May 1998. That very important initiative should be fully utilized to ensure the peace and prosperity of the whole world. The inclusion in the agenda of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session of an additional agenda item dealing with the question would enable the United Nations to play a dynamic role in that respect. He hoped that a unanimous decision would underline the importance of the planned event, the interest of the United Nations in it and the Organization's desire to contribute materially to its success. His delegation wished to thank the countries friendly to it, the international agencies, the religious figures and, in particular, the Secretary-General, for their interest in the project.

27. The CHAIRMAN endorsed the comments just made. A number of countries had asked to co-sponsor the resolutions the Committee might adopt. Mr. Abdou Diouf, the President of Senegal, had taken steps to see that that would be done.

28. If there were no objections, he would consider that the Committee wished to take note of the report under discussion.

29. It was so decided.

NORTH AMERICAN NGO SYMPOSIUM ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE, UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, 15 TO 17 JUNE 1998 (Working Paper No. 6)

30. The CHAIRMAN said that if there were no objections he would take it that the Committee wished to approve the provisional programme for the North American NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine to be held at United Nations Headquarters from 15 to 17 June 1998.

31. It was so decided.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS AND THE SITUATION IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY, INCLUDING JERUSALEM

32. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Observer for Palestine) recalled that the day before, the Palestinian people had solemnly commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Nakba (disaster) which had marked its dispossession and the uprooting of more than 750,000 Palestinians. To commemorate the day, a march of 1 million people had been organized throughout the whole of occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. However, as if the sufferings of the Palestinian people were not enough, the Israeli army had opened fire, killing eight people, including two 8-year-old children and wounding about 400 other people, some of whom were in serious condition. Those bloody events had taken place in a number of localities in the Gaza Strip, in particular near the illegal settlement of Gush Katif, thus demonstrating that even the Gaza Strip remained under Israeli

occupation. The wounded came from all parts of the occupied Palestinian territory. Moreover, during the night of 13 May, another criminal act had been committed in the holy city of Jerusalem, where a band of fanatics had burned Bab al-Ghawanima, which was a part of the Haram al-Sharif. The Israeli authorities had done nothing to prevent that act, which must now be added to the already endless list of desecrations committed by Israeli fanatics. The international community must condemn that criminal act in the most vigorous terms.

33. He had sent a letter to the President of the Security Council concerning the recent incidents and had transmitted copies of it to the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly. In their statements, the Israeli leaders, and in particular, Mr. Netanyahu, had blamed the incidents on the Palestinians. That racist attitude must be condemned.

34. Furthermore, seeking to obstruct the efforts to save the peace process, the Israeli Prime Minister had rejected the invitation of the United States to take part in a trilateral summit meeting with President Yasser Arafat on 11 May 1998 in Washington on the permanent-status negotiations. Mr. Netanyahu had rejected the United States invitation because it was conditioned on acceptance by his country of United States proposals to restart the peace talks. That rejection had not only dealt a severe blow to the peace process, it had also deepened Israel's isolation in the international arena, proving once again that the Israeli Government had no intention of carrying out the peace agreements. For some time, the United States administration had been seeking to persuade the two parties to accept the compromise proposals dealing with various aspects of the implementation of the agreements, the most important of which concerned the further redeployment of the Israeli army, which was to withdraw from 13.1 per cent of the territory of the occupied West Bank, security measures, the third redeployment and a halt to the establishment of settlements. The 13.1 per cent figure was well below that expected by the Palestinians on the basis of the peace agreements. The figure represented a compromise between the percentage proposed by Israel (9 per cent) and that called for by the Palestinians (30 per cent).

35. The United States Secretary of State, Ms. Madeleine Albright, who had sent the invitation to take part in the trilateral summit in Washington after the failure of the talks between the Palestinian and Israeli leaders held in London on 4 May 1998 owing to Israel's intransigence, had said that the United States Government would not accept any change in the proposals it had made and that the invitation was conditional on acceptance of the United States proposals. Ms. Albright had added that if no agreement was reached, the Government of the United States might be led to re-examine its approach to the peace process. The Secretary of State had also rejected Mr. Netanyahu's arguments concerning security, saying that the proposals of the United States were fair and did not threaten Israel's security. The arguments put forward by Israel were fallacious, in view of the fact that the peace agreements were based on the application of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). If Israel now claimed that a deployment as limited as that proposed by the United States threatened its security, what would its attitude be at a later stage?

36. Furthermore, the settlements were and always would be illegal. The land on which they were built belonged to Palestinians and every attempt to seize land

issued from an absolutely unacceptable colonial mentality that would inevitably lead to the failure of the peace process. As far as they were concerned, the Palestinians would accept no modification in the sequence of steps they had already approved. If the efforts currently being made to relaunch the peace process were unsuccessful, the Israeli Government must bear the entire responsibility for that failure and for the consequences it would have. The Palestinians would then ask the United States Government to fulfil the obligations incumbent upon it as co-sponsor of the peace process in the Middle East. In the meantime, they would continue to count on the support of the Committee, the United Nations and the entire international community.

37. The Palestinians had a reasonable political position, based on international legitimacy, and their concern was to advance the peace process so as to arrive at a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

38. As for the scheduled visit that very day to United Nations Headquarters by Mr. Netanyahu, it could only be deemed inopportune.

39. The CHAIRMAN asked the Observer for Palestine to transmit to President Arafat the Committee's condolences for the lives lost as a result of the tragic incidents in question and to assure him of the Committee's support.

40. Mr. MEKDAD (Syria) said that he appreciated the efforts the Committee was making to support the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, which was still struggling with oppression, injustice and terror tactics. Indeed, not content with usurping the territory of another people, perpetrating innumerable crimes, violating that people's legitimate, fundamental rights by depriving it of all rights, including the most elementary human rights, or persisting in flouting the rights of the Syrian and Lebanese peoples by continuing to occupy the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon, Israel by its latest actions had again produced victims. Ten innocent Palestinian civilians had been killed in the recent incident. One might ask what the reaction of the media and of those who talk of international legality would have been if the victims of those tragic incidents had belonged to the other camp. One might also ask what had become of the much-touted values of peace and respect for international law. In fact, it would seem that whenever the inalienable rights of the Palestinian or Arab peoples were involved, those values no longer existed. One might also ask by what logic the Palestinian people should be compelled to go on foregoing rights that international law recognized as its rightful due.

41. His delegation agreed with the Observer for Palestine about Mr. Netanyahu's visit to United Nations Headquarters. Indeed, the Israeli Prime Minister, who was refusing to grant what the previous Israeli Governments had accepted within the framework of the peace process, intended to defend Israel's right to usurp still more Arab lands and destroy the peace process. His delegation therefore expected that those who met with Mr. Netanyahu would insist that Israel should respect international law and apply the relevant United Nations resolutions.

42. The Syrian people had full sympathy with the sufferings of its brother Palestinian people. The Palestinian and Syrian masses had acted in concert to commemorate the anniversary of al-nakbah, more resolved than ever to carry on the battle to achieve the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The

Syrian Arab Republic itself would continue its support for this righteous struggle until a just and comprehensive settlement was achieved that would guarantee the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State on its own land.

43. Mr. RODRIGUEZ-PARRILLA (Cuba) thanked the Committee for having met under difficult and special circumstances, and asked the Palestinian delegation to transmit to President Arafat and to the Palestinian people the condolences of his Government and people. The Cuban people stood in solidarity with the Palestinian cause and the Arab cause.

44. His delegation was disturbed by the deteriorating situation. The international community and the United Nations had a responsibility to do everything in their power to prevent the peace process from stalling. Cuba's position on the question was very clear: the Cuban Government had always taken a very firm stand in favour of the Palestinian and Arab causes and it had at all times resolutely opposed any form of racism, including the racism directed at the Palestinian people and the other Arab peoples.

45. Furthermore, as things stood, the question was what the Security Council and the General Assembly, the bodies responsible for protecting human rights, the information organs of the United Nations and the media in general would do to assume their responsibilities. His delegation wondered how long it would be the policy of United Nations bodies to practise a double-standard. He hoped that a halt would be called to the serious, flagrant violations of the rights of the Palestinians, that they would be able to regain their inalienable rights, that all the occupied Arab territories would be returned and, finally, that the right of the Palestinians to establish their own independent State with Jerusalem as its capital could be achieved.

46. The CHAIRMAN said that he took it the Committee wished him to send on its behalf a telegram of condolences and support to President Arafat.

47. It was so decided.

48. Mr. ZACKEOS (Cyprus) said that his delegation had listened with interest to the statement of the Observer for Palestine. In the name of his Government and people, he expressed condolences to the Palestinian people for the loss of life sustained the previous day. The reasons for the impasse in the peace process were well known. The process must be relaunched, for without a settlement of the Palestinian problem there could be no comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East.

49. Mr. RASTAM (Malaysia) presented his condolences to the Palestinian people and assured it of the solidarity of Malaysia, which fully supported the efforts being made by President Arafat and hoped for a revival of the peace process. After hearing the Observer for Palestine report on his consultations with the President of the Security Council in that regard, he hoped that the Council would make a pronouncement on the issues discussed.

OTHER MATTERS

50. The CHAIRMAN recalled that the United Nations Seminar and NGO Symposium for Latin America and the Caribbean on the Question of Palestine, which would focus on the theme "Towards a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine: The role of Latin America and the Caribbean", would be held in Santiago, Chile, from 26 to 29 May 1998. The Committee would be represented there by Mr. Rodriguez-Parrilla (Cuba), Vice-Chairman, Mr. Saliba (Malta), Rapporteur, Mr. Zackeos (Cyprus) and Mr. Al-Kidwa (Observer for Palestine). A report on that meeting would be made to the Committee at the appropriate time.

The meeting rose at noon.